

Fates of the Force: Book 1-Vader's Trap

by Kali

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Summary: Intertwined with the classic trilogy, return to Tatooine with Luke, Vader and all your favorites

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****_FATES OF THE FORCE_****

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****BOOK 1: VADER'S TRAP****

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****_An original short story by Maureen Kuppe**

> Featuring characters from the Star Wars Trilogy by George Lucas_**

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> September, 1997

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****_ONE_ ****

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Blackness subsided and consciousness gradually returned. Her first thoughts were of a throbbing head pounding against the confines of her helmet and the taste of a warm, salty stickiness in her mouth. _Why am I bleeding? Am I dreaming?_ But the slightest movement shot

stabbing pain throughout her entire body. _No, this can't be real; but it's not a dream either -- this is more like a nightmare._

Over the ringing in her ears, strange sounds coalesced, forming as if far away, through a tunnel. A clanking of metal. A click. The sound of the ship's canopy opening with a hiss. She felt a gust of cool air on her face.

"She's still alive, sir."

"Good; we're in luck. Bring her with us, as ordered."

And then she dared to open her eyes. Dizzily, Kali forced herself to focus on the figure unstrapping her restraints. White armor, black soulless eyes -- before she passed out from the pain of being moved, Kali knew she was in much more trouble than any nightmare could offer...

_TWO _

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Tatooine: approximately three years earlier...

"Biggs, please! Take me with you!" Kali bounced up and down in front of him, attempting to cut off his path into the speeder bay.

"Not this time! Why can't I go out without you always tagging along?" He dodged around her, but she persisted and ran after him as he hopped into the family landspeeder.

"Please? I'll be good ... I won't bother you or your friends. I just need to get a few things at the Trader's."

"All right! All right!" Biggs sighed, as he surrendered yet again to his little sister's plea. "But let's go ... now!"

As they raced away from the homestead, Kali couldn't take her eyes off her big brother as he effortlessly handled the speeder through the valleys and canyons of the Jundland Wastes. She was afraid if she looked away, he would already be gone. Biggs had always been there when she needed him -- but all too soon he would be going away, far from her and far from their home. She couldn't bear to think about that yet. He was her only sibling, her best friend, her confidant, and he was still with her now.

Biggs could feel her gaze on him, and knew what she was thinking. Even though he wouldn't admit it to her face, he really did enjoy all the time they spent together. He smirked to himself as he remembered how, much to their parents' dismay, he would take her flying at a very young age, speeding along and showing off in their old dilapidated skyhopper. Kali squealed with delight as the wind whipped her dark hair wildly around her face. They both shared the thrill of careening down Beggar's Canyon, streaking through the Stone Needle, experiencing the exhilaration that only flying could provide. Now Kali had turned out to be a good pilot as well. Good? Heck, she was turning out to be as good a pilot as any of his buddies!

They reached Anchorhead in no time at all. Biggs turned down familiar streets, and parked in front of the local hangout on the far side of town. There they were, waiting for him. 'The gang'.

"It's about time, guy!" Deak yelled as Biggs lept out of the hovering speeder.

"I know, I know. Kali, go get your stuff at the Trader's. We'll meet you in the vidcenter." He turned and joined his friends.

"Okay." She got out and surveyed the group carefully. _Great! Luke's here too._ She blushed at his broad smile and darted into the store.

"Why do you have to keep dragging her around everywhere you go lately?" Windy asked.

"It's okay." Luke interjected. "She's a good kid. I think she's just trying to get in as much time with her big brother as possible before he leaves." Biggs thanked Luke with a glance. He knew most of his friends didn't have siblings, or if they did, they probably weren't as close as Kali and he had become. He was going to miss her. A lot. So he didn't mind her rapt attention, but he also knew he wasn't the only reason she wanted to come along to Anchorhead. She had a crush on his best friend. Everyone but Luke could see that. Biggs had to admit his little sister was growing up fast. Too fast.

"So Luke, have you put in your application yet?" Biggs inquired, trying to change the subject.

"No but I'm going to tell Uncle Owen tomorrow that I'm applying for the Academy this year ... finally!"

"I sure hope he takes the news better than last year!" Biggs teased.

Luke would never forget the look on his uncle's face when he told him of his future plans. _How upset he got! It was as if Owen was scared to let go of him ..._

"Well," added Biggs, "I'm all set. My entrance form is on the holonet, and I'm just waiting for the word. This is the best time to go Luke -- with the Rebellion gaining strength."

"Blast it Biggs! I know, I know!" Luke was exasperated. He really wanted to follow his best friend into the Academy. He had to think of a way to convince his aunt and uncle to let him go.

Deak called to them. "Come on, you guys! We're going down into the vid for a cool one! Do you want to stay out here under the hot suns all day?"

Biggs started to join them, but turned and stopped to wait for Luke.

"You go ahead, Biggs." Luke prompted. "I'll meet you there in a bit. I've got some thinking to do."

Luke needed to come up with a plan, and he couldn't do that in a noisy vidcenter, full of loud music and electronic games bleeping.

Absentmindedly, he found himself walking up to the Point, overlooking the Jundland Wastes. He looked skyward, and felt more depressed than ever. How he yearned to fly in the Academy, side-by-side with his best friend. So much adventure and excitement to experience! But then his gaze turned downward. Down at the dust, the sand and the gravel that was Tatooine. _No! I'll be stuck here forever if I leave it up to Uncle Owen! I've just got to come up with a way to convince him to let me go!_

"Are you okay?" Kali whispered.

Luke started and spun around. He didn't even hear her come up. _I really must have been daydreaming._ "Huh? Oh, yeah, I'm okay. Just thinking, that's all. Thinking about how I'll never get off this sandpit of a planet!"

"That would be just fine with me" she admitted. Luke was ready to argue the point, but suddenly, standing there alone together, looking into her large brown eyes, Luke realized that Kali wasn't a small kid anymore. Somehow, when he wasn't paying attention, she had turned into a lovely young woman.

"Okay you two." Biggs called. He wasn't surprised to find Kali out here alone with Luke, but he was still her big brother, and Kali was his responsibility while they were out. "Are you coming in or what?"

"Coming!" answered Kali. She flashed Luke a smile and scampered down the hill to join her brother.

Luke remained for a moment, left standing and staring at his best friend's sister. He had completely forgotten what he had come out here to think about. Shaking his head to clear it, he sauntered inside after her.

_**THREE** _

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It was one of the most difficult things he had to do. First Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru. Then Ben was gone. And now Biggs. Even the triumph over the Death Star didn't ease the feeling of great personal loss. All the memories of the times Biggs and he had shared together came flooding back. The ceremony would be in less than an hour. A hero's funeral, but a funeral nonetheless. Sitting alone in his room, head in his hands, he wondered how would he ever get through the memorial service.

He looked up at the sound of a soft knock on the door. "There's someone here who wants to see you." Leia gently announced.

"Not now, Leia, please. I just want to be alone for awhile." Luke needed to summon all his fledgling Jedi powers to hold his emotions in check today.

"Not even to see me?"

Luke looked up. He hardly recognized her. Kali was in a formal flight

uniform. Her long brown hair was braided neatly down the left side of her face. Dressed like that, she seemed older, wiser, but with the same look of pain he felt himself.

"Kali! What are you doing here? What a stupid question. I'm sorry, of course I know why you're here. How are you?" He stood and welcomed her in. He could tell she had been crying, but he could still see what an attractive woman she'd become. She walked into his arms with a shuddering sob. Luke was glad she had come; now they could get through this together.

_**FOUR** _

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"So after you all left, I decided to enlist in the Alliance too. Mom and Dad weren't overly thrilled, but I love it." Kali beamed, and the emotions of the past few days were finally beginning to wear off. She sat across the table from Luke in the mess hall, slowly stirring her stim-tea. "I wish I could have been there with you at the Death Star, but our squadron was just going into action when you and Biggs finally ended it." A mixed look of pride and sorrow swept over her face at the mention of her brother's name.

"Well, you're here now, and that's all that matters. I'm looking forward to catching up with you. How about joining me at the tapcafe tonight? We can talk some more and get re-acquainted again." Kali couldn't believe her ears. It was too good to be true. After all this time, she knew she still cared for Luke very much.

_FIVE _

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"Blue Five! You've got a squint on your tail!" Confusing audio was streaming in and out of his headset from the fighter squad. It took practice to sort out what was directed at him.

"I see it, I see it! Seven, are you there?" Luke was getting anxious now. He rocked his snubfighter from side to side trying to avoid a direct hit.

"Seven here, Five. I've got him." Kali zeroed in her targeting computer and sprayed the eyeball with the quad laser cannons. The interceptor's ion engines exploded, and in a second, it was gone.

"Thanks, Seven. I owe you one." Luke let out the breath he hadn't realized he had been holding.

"You owe more than that, Five. Or haven't you been keeping track? You're lucky this is just a flightsim." Kali loved to tease Luke, and the other squad members understood. Nowadays, if you saw Luke, you saw Kali right beside him. But the Blue Squadron Commander didn't understand. Nor did he wish this to go on any further.

"It is just not regulation! I will not jeopardize my squad because of an emotional link two of my best pilots have for one another!" Commander Rehgis had finally had enough and was adamant. He paced the stone floor back and forth in front of Leia. Even though they were fortunate enough to find these deserted buildings among the jungles of Saurat, this latest Rebel hideout lacked a formal Command Center. Leia desperately wanted to discuss this matter in private, but the Commander had tracked her down and cornered her just outside her quarters. He was ranting now. "Ensign Darklighter will have to be transferred to another squadron immediately, before we have to depend on those fighters out there for real."

Leia knew he was right. But that didn't make it any easier for her to break the news to Luke. She would have to do it carefully, or else he may think that jealousy played a part in her, no their, decision. She sighed. _Perhaps I'm not up to this new leadership role thrust upon me after all. _

"I understand your concern, Leia, but Kali and I fly well together." Luke said. "Just because we share more than our work is not a reason to separate us." However, deep down, Luke worried too. He found that more and more, he was looking to see where Kali's X-wing was, to see how she was handling herself in these practice skirmishes with simulated TIES. He didn't know how he would react if something happened to her for real. After hearing Leia out, Luke resigned himself to the fact that they had to follow their orders from Command. "Just let me be the one to tell her" he asked.

"All right, Luke, but Commander Rehgis wants this effective right away. We are responsible for establishing this base on Saurat, and she will be re-assigned to patrol duty with the External Fleet. Even though the destruction of the Death Star was a setback, the Empire still has a tight grip on many of the worlds in this system. We need you both where it counts the most and where you'll do your best."

Luke felt a knot in the pit of his stomach. Everything had been going too well lately. He was improving his piloting skills, his Jedi powers were just beginning to bloom and his new found friendships with Leia, Han and Chewie helped to replace the friends and family he had so suddenly lost. He and Kali had become very close and were even starting to talk about their future together. Now those plans would have to wait and he didn't know for how long.

"Is this what you want Luke?" Tears welled up in her eyes. Kali knew she was being over-emotional, but she seemed to have little control over her feelings lately. They had talked about making their partnership 'official' soon, so she thought he would be thrilled with the news she the medic droid just gave her. She feared she would never see him again. _How can I tell him now?_

"It probably will be for the best." Luke offered. "We can wait until things settle down a bit, and still get together when we're on leave. Who knows what's in store for us next? There's word that we may be moving to Hoth soon. Do you really want to be stuck on that ice cube when you could be piloting around the galaxy? I know I'd rather have your assignment." He was trying to make the best of a bad situation. Luke really did want her to be safe, and he knew he just couldn't keep his mind on his job and her at the same time. Not now, with the Empire chasing them still. Maybe in the future. Soon.

Kali was trying to understand, but she could not get past the fact that the timing was just couldn't be worse. _If only this could have waited another few months or so ..._

_**SIX** _

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"Luke, we need your squad to check out a problem." Leia walked briskly through the fighter hanger toward his ship. She knew she would find him here, hard at work on his Incom T-65. He stopped his maintenance checks and turned to face her. Luke had to admire how Leia was gaining assurance of her leadership in the Rebel Alliance. He also respected her authority, but something in her voice concerned him.

"Right on it. What are the details?" he asked as he wiped the grease from his hands.

"We have just intercepted transmissions from a Star Destroyer in this sector. They may not know we're here, but we can't take any chances sitting around like nerfs. Your squad is to take position over Saurat and prepare to provide cover in case we're discovered. We may need to evacuate to Hoth earlier than we had hoped."

Luke didn't like the sound of that. At least here on Saurat, they were well camouflaged under the jungle cover. He wasn't looking forward to spending time on a world of snow and ice, especially when Kali wasn't around to keep him warm. Luke thought of her often lately, daily, in fact, and he promised himself that he would try to reach her on the holonet if they made any move.

"On our way. I'll get the squad together." Luke locked the housing on his ship and hopped aboard. Artoo was already his droid socket, checking the motivator drive unit. "Blue Squad - report to stations!" he broadcasted into the commlink. "Well Artoo, here we go again" he announced as he strapped himself in and prepared for liftoff.

"Luke, I have a confirmation bearing 721 on the scanner." This was no simulation today. The squad locked S-foils and pulled into formation high above the planet.

"I've got it too, Wedge. Looks like a Star Destroyer all right. Keep your distance, we don't want them spotting us too soon." _What are they doing here? Was it just luck, or do they really know the Rebel base is down below?_

The answer to his question came all too soon. From planetside ahead of them, the Super-Star Destroyer _Executor_ rose into visual range. Immediately, legions of TIES swept down upon the small X-wing squad.

Vader! "It's a full attack! Blue Five to Command. Evacuate! Repeat - evacuate at once!" Luke tried to keep cool, but with these overwhelming odds, it was difficult to do.

The first duty Leia performed was to send out a distress signal to

the Fleet as the other Commanders at the base went into action. Within seconds, sirens blared as plans made for this contingency were put into motion. Transports were filled with supplies and crew in an all-too familiar routine they had performed many times before.

Luke and his squadron tried their best to make a path for the transports' escape, but they were outnumbered. _If only we had more firepower,_ he thought. And, as if in answer to his wish, out of hyperspace the rest of the Rebel Fleet appeared. X-wings, Y-wings and B-wings led the Fleet into the fray. Battles were being fought all around him, while Luke tried his best to take out as many TIES as possible.

A voice from the past made him jump.

"Luke, you've got one bearing down on you! I'll try to take him out ..." Kali got the TIE in her sights and fired. But at the same moment it returned green lasers into Luke's X-wing. Artoo squealed as the ship was hit. The shields held, but barely. _Another strike like that, and I'm done for._ The Imp exploded from Kali's shot as she zipped past him.

"Are you all right Lu..?" Her communication was cut short, as an interceptor bore down on her fighter and struck her side on. She couldn't understand for a moment, it happened so fast. Sparks flew as nearly all her controls shorted out. Transmissions went down and sublight engine power was dropping quickly.

"Blast!" she cried, trying to recover. "Luke, I'm hit! I don't think I can regain control!" But Luke couldn't hear her -- he could only watch. He dreaded this moment; feeling sick, angry and confused all at the same time. _How can I help her?_ Before he knew it, he saw her X-wing dive into the planet's shadow. Her ship was crashing, and he could do nothing to prevent it.

"Kali!" Luke watched helplessly as the ship fell out of view into the atmosphere below. A blinding flash of TIE laserfire outside his viewscreen brought his attention back to the battle. He was on autopilot now, not caring if he lived or died and began firing like a wildman, hitting anything in sight. Soon the TIES began to break off, to retreat, and he didn't realize at first why. The Star Destroyer was calling them back to it's launch bays, gathering them in to chase the Rebel transports evacuating Saurat.

"All fighters. Prepare for hyperspace with the rest of the Fleet!" The squad was being ordered to formation, but there was no response from Blue Five. Wedge saw what had happened to Kali and was also calling Luke, trying to bring him back to reality. "Come on Luke! There's nothing you can do now! Let's go!"

Artoo confirmed their hyperspeed drives were still in working order. But Luke wasn't responding. The astromech droid took over the controls and brought him in line with the Fleet. The stars around him began to lengthen and with a flash, they were gone.

Luke barely noticed.

_SEVEN _

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Kali fought to regain control of her doomed ship. "R4, try to lock down the landing gear! We're going down whether we're ready or not."

Black space and stars gave way quickly to blue sky and clouds. The ship shuddered and rocked violently, and Kali was sure it was going to tear apart. There was no response to her frantic attempts to maneuver; the power convertors were now dead. All she could do was keep the wings as level as possible. Her mind raced. She glanced at the two holoprints of her and Luke tacked to the flight console. _Why didn't I tell Luke when I had the chance? It was too late now. Too late to tell him the most important news he could ever hear ..._

The ship plummeted through the atmosphere and in a flash she was at treetop level, the nose cone slicing through the dense green foliage. Her ears were filled with deafening scraping and tearing, as she sank lower into the thick jungle growth. Then it was dark ... and suddenly, everything stopped.

EIGHT

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The _Executor_ continued it's slow orbit around Saurat. Vader was not pleased that the Rebels had once again slipped from his grasp. He stared out the viewport into the sector of space where they had made their escape. Even though his back was toward the advancing officer, he knew who had just joined him on the command walkway.

"Admiral Dysan. Report your findings." The Imperial Commander glanced at the datapad in his hands.

"Yes, sir. We tracked the fighter as it descended planetside. We discovered the X-wing inoperable but intact, and the pilot barely alive. We transported her aboard via a repulsorlift pad. She is in the bacta tank now. She has been identified as one 'Ensign Kali Darklighter' of the Rebel Fleet. We also found this." He handed his Lord a photo of Kali and Luke.

"Is she expected to live?" The Dark Lord's mind was already developing a plan. He knew this pilot meant something to the young Skywalker. He could sense Luke's concern through the Force during the battle. That is why he had her ship followed. Now he knew the reason for those strong feelings.

"Yes sir. Even though her injuries are quite severe, I have been informed she will survive."

"Very good. When she is able, bring her to me. In the meantime, set a course for the Dantooine system. Now that we have eradicated them from this sector, the Emperor has instructed us to ensure that no Rebels remain there as well. Perhaps it will also provide us with a clue to their new hideout." With a sweep of his black cape, Darth Vader departed from the bridge.

The Admiral slumped with relief. Shaking, he remembered vividly what had happened to others who brought the Dark Lord of the Sith bad news. The escape of the Rebels was frustrating, but luckily for him, Lord Vader had something special in mind for this Rebel scum.

> NINE **

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"Luke, it's out of the question!" Leia had to bring him out of this depression, and back to where he could do some good for the Rebellion. She knew what it meant to loose a loved one, but they had to press on, to keep strong and focused. Now that they were safely on Hoth, she spent the majority of her days planning their next maneuver.

"Leia, I know she must still be alive. I can feel it. I need to make sure. We are settled here now, you don't need me -- I want to return to Saurat to see if I can find her."

Not even a visit from Han and Chewie could bring Luke out of his despair or change his mind.

"I really don't know what else we can do." Han told Leia. "Chewie and me have tried talking to him, but I've never seen Luke so devastated before."

Han was right. Now Luke had gone to the next stage of his grief; denial. Leia could not bear to see him in such a state. If it meant closure, she had half a mind to let him go. But not alone.

"Han, how about you and Chewie joining Luke, to keep an eye on him, so we'll be sure he returns in one piece?" She could also see that Han needed something to do. He was getting nervous just hanging around the Rebel base, and she was afraid he might feel the need to leave. Thanks to Jabba, he still had a price on his head and bounty hunters could track down anyone if they stayed in one place too long.

"You got it Your Highness. There's not much for us to do here anyway, and I hate just waiting for something to happen. We'll take the _Falcon_, and hopefully put an end to this once and for all."

"Thank you, Han." Leia looked genuinely concerned. Han didn't like his sudden feelings of jealousy. Luke was a good friend, and he would do anything for him, but those feelings conflicted with Han's attraction to Leia. If Luke didn't find his old girlfriend, would he bounce back to the Princess? Han wasn't so sure he liked the prospect of competition again.

Despite the cold outside, Leia was just beginning to warm up to him, and surprisingly, he liked that feeling.

TEN

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"C'mon kid, let's go." Han was anxious to leave this frosted wasteland for a bit and the familiarity of the _Falcon_ always put him at ease and in control. Chewie roared his readiness, and soon they were climbing high over the frozen terrain of Hoth.

To Luke, it seemed like forever before they arrived at their destination. "The last visual I had was over in this area." As soon as they returned to Saurat, Luke seemed anxious and his voice was strained, frightened of what he might, or might not, find. The expanse of jungle on this part of the planet was overwhelming.

"Take her down, Chewie. We'll do a low flyby and see if we can pick up anything on our sensors." Han was relieved that the area was clear of Imps. Obviously, after the Rebels had evacuated, they didn't feel there was anything left worth monitoring.

The beeping of the scanner's alarm made Luke jump. His heart raced at the prospect of picking up Kali's automatic distress signal. He looked out the viewport to see if he could spot anything, but they were up much too high for a visual sighting. Even though he knew this, he could not take his eyes off the jungle below.

"Okay, Chewie, let's take her down there." Han pointed to an area that seemed to have been burned. A long track of vegetation was scorched, and ended in a blackened gully further ahead.

"Well, the ship didn't break up, which is good, but there's no sign of Kali." Han offered as he walked around the crumpled X-wing, his mind uneasy. _What happened here? Her Arfour unit was gone too. Had she walked away from the crash? It was unlikely she could have gotten far, seeing all the blood in the ship. And there was no trail of blood outside the X-wing which should lead us to where she wandered off. Her emergency survival pack was still here too._

Luke didn't know what to think. He was glad they hadn't found her body in the cockpit, but he was concerned that she was obviously badly hurt. And missing. He removed a picture fastened to the console. It was the one of he and Kali when they had been together on Saurat. They were so happy then, and it seemed like such a long time ago. He quickly shoved the picture in his pocket before Han or Chewie could see.

He looked over to Chewbacca when he heard the Wookiee growl for their attention. Chewie was gesturing for Han and Luke to see something he had found not far from the crash site.

Han crouched down to examine the ground. "Looks like a second ship landed here Luke. Thanks to furball's nose, he found the garbage they left behind. From that and the shape of these flattened patches of grass I'd guess they were caused by twin-gear landing pads -- it looks like there was an Imperial Lambda class shuttle here not too long ago."

The Wookiee whined in agreement. Luke lifted his eyes from the depressions in the ground and stared at his friends. They had at least part of their answer. Kali may still be alive, but the clues were pointing to the fact that she was in the Empire's hands now.

ELEVEN

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"What do you want with me?" Kali tried to put on a tough facade, but inside she was frightened to death. Her flightsuit had been replaced with a gray prisoner jumpsuit. Never in her worst nightmares had she imagined being held hostage on an Imperial Star Destroyer by Darth Vader himself. Physically she was drained too as she tried to stand tall and strong in front of the Stormtroopers. Her injuries were healing, but she still had difficulty using her left arm. It reminded her just how close she had come to making the 'Final Jump'.

"It is not you I want." Darth hissed as he pointed a black-gloved finger at her. "It is a friend of yours. Surely bait as tempting as you will bring him to me. I just wanted to ensure you are well enough for my use."

_Luke! He was trying to capture Luke! _She couldn't keep the alarm from her face. The Dark Lord seemed to enjoy her look of panic. He knew this was a perfect method to trap young Skywalker.

"Thank you, Ensign Darklighter. You have confirmed my assumptions. You still have strong feelings for Skywalker. Excellent. Guards, take her away! I will send for her when I am ready."

The Troopers seemed to take pleasure in shoving her forward with their blasters. As she limped back to her cell, her mind reeled. _What can I do to warn Luke?_

TWELVE

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What I need to find out is, how did they discover our base on Saurat? I don't think the possibility of an Imperial spy in our midst can be ruled out. Leia mulled this over and over in her mind while she dressed in her new icy quarters. She wished that Han and Luke would return soon. She depended on their support, insight and opinions to make the best decisions.

C-3PO hated Hoth. His joints were continually freezing up and the surface of the floors left him with a less than dignified walk. His feet were not manufactured for icy surfaces - unless he was careful, he would find himself sliding around out of control. Yet he prided himself with the fact that he had important communications to relay to the highest officials in the Rebellion; like the one he was asked to deliver now. "Princess Leia, there is a message for you in the Command Center."

"Thank you Threepio. I'll be right there." She threw on her warm vest and hurried down the corridor. The snow crunched beneath her boots and in her haste she nearly slipped turning the corner to the main Control Room. She knew she was anxious for news from Han, but she had to remain calm. Fears of the worst kept creeping into her mind ever

since they had left.

She leaned over to the microphone on the communication console and switched it to transmit mode. "Han! What did you find? Are you all right?"

"Yeah, Princess, we're okay, but our little trip here has raised more questions than it answered." Han filled her in on their discovery as best he could.

"Luke wants to go running off after her, but since we have no leads of where she went, Chewie and me have convinced him to return to Hoth to make a formal plan. We're on our way back." The reception was breaking up, and it was hard for Leia to hear the transmission clearly.

"Good, Han. Tell Luke I'm sorry, but we'll do whatever we can to find out what happened. Get back quick, I need your help with something."

"You got it, your Highness." Han clicked off the holonet. "Okay, Chewie, let's go - and get out the warm clothes again. We're gonna need them!"

Chewie chuckled. At least he didn't mind getting back; his fur handled the cold just fine.

In the forward cargo hold, Luke absent-mindedly played his fingers over the holographic gameboard. An image flashed before his eyes. _Vader! He has Kali, I just know it!_ He could feel her pain and Vader's contrite smugness. Luke would have to figure out how to find the _Executor_, and fast.

****_THIRTEEN_****

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"Han. How is Luke?" Leia was glad to have them all back safe again.

"He suddenly has a burst of energy I haven't seen in a long time. He's possessed like he's on a mission or something. As soon as we landed, he went straight to the Command Center and started asking a million questions of the radar crew there. I don't know what he's up to, but it's good to see him active again."

Leia wasn't so sure about that. She made a mental note to track him down and find out what he was up to.

"Han, I believe we may have a spy in our midst. How else can we explain the Empire's sudden attack on Saurat?"

"I think you may be right. Chewie and I have been discussing the same thing, but I didn't want to worry you until we had something ferrocrete to go on. Do you remember that droid on Yavin IV, after the awards ceremony? I had a bad feeling about it's sudden appearance, and the way it was always following us around. I know there were dozens of maintenance droids being used back then, but I

also noticed this particular one using the communication scomp links when we moved to Saurat. It seemed 'out of character' - if you can apply that term to droids - to a maintenance unit.

I took it upon myself to investigate further, but it disappeared as suddenly as it appeared, shortly before the attack. It's markings were unlike any other Rebel droid on the base. I would guess that either it was an Imperial remote droid, or someone here was using it to gain access to our confidential files. It may be gone, but our spy could still be lingering around."

Leia hated to think that one of her team would be the infiltrator. She had yet another item to add to her mental 'to do' list - review the backgrounds of all her staff to see if anything unusual came up. But she could not possibly do that alone. "I think I'll have Threepio check the databanks" she said.

"Good, keep Goldenrod busy and out of our hair. I'm going to join Chewie on the Falcon to do some post-flight checks." Han stood and turned to leave. "I'll check in with you later to see if anything turns up."

FOURTEEN

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"The Fleet has reported that the Executor has just arrived in the Dantooine system, sir. We hadn't planned on engaging it, since we abandoned that base long ago. We felt that if they kept going on wild nerf-chases, we had a better chance of being undiscovered here on Hoth." Major Derlin could see that Luke was very concerned about something. He admired the young hero very much, and hoped he could help him.

"Thanks." Luke said as he was halfway down the corridor in a rush to find Leia.

"I'm going to Dantooine." It wasn't a request, just a simple statement of fact. Leia didn't know how to react. She felt he was risking his own life to potentially chase after a ghost, but perhaps she would do the same thing if it were her.

"Luke, why don't you wait for Han? Maybe he and Chewie can go with you â€|"

"No, Leia, not this time. I have a better chance of slipping in if I go alone with Artoo and my X-wing. The Falcon is too well known now, and I wouldn't ask Han or Chewie to put their necks out like that for me."

"What are you going to do when you get there? Luke, you know this could be a trap."

"I'm positive it's a trap, Leia. But I would never forgive myself if I didn't go. I know you'd do the same for Han or me."

Leia blushed at the mention of Han's name. Are my feelings for him that obvious? I'll have to be more professional in the future -

especially around others._ "All right, Luke, but please be careful. May the Force be with you."

"I will, and thanks."

FIFTEEN

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"Yes, R2, I do know what I'm doing. When I find her, I've got to have a way to bring her back don't I?" Artoo whined. He didn't want to see Luke jeopardize them both by removing the ship's survival gear, back up generators and the other equipment he was so haphazardly throwing out.

Luke surveyed his work. The cockpit could now hold two people, albeit a tight fit. It was all he could do, other than take a slower, bulkier transport. After loading his ship's two proton torpedo launchers, he checked his personal sidearms. His lightsaber was clipped to his belt and his blaster was charged. He was as prepared as he would ever be.

"Okay, I think we're ready now. Start her up Artoo. Let's go."

SIXTEEN

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Kali was getting restless. Like a caged animal, she paced back and forth in her dark cell, looking for any way out. Only the cold black metal floor, walls and ceiling gave no hint of joints or seams that could be worked on. Even the doorframes seemed to fuse into the adjoining wall when sealed. Her jumpsuit had no pockets, no fasteners, nothing she could remove to use as a tool or weapon. It was hopeless. She slumped helplessly on her sleeping pad. As she lay there, she wished something would happen to give her an opportunity to escape.

Her wish was granted sooner than she thought. She bolted upright from her bed as her door suddenly creaked open. Two Stormtroopers entered her cell, motioning her towards them. One shackled her wrists with binders and the other shoved her out of the cell. Silently they led her down the stark corridors of the Imperial ship, blasters at the ready. After two turbolift rides and numerous turns that had her completely lost, they arrived at a shuttle hanger. She could see a ship being prepared for liftoff. _What now?_ she thought to herself. Something familiar caught her eye on the far side of the hanger bay. _Arfour! They had brought him here too!_ Upon recognition of his former master, the droid dropped the maintenance tools he had been assigned and began to slowly advance to her.

The Troopers reported to their Commander at the foot of the shuttle's ramp.

"Your prisoner sir."

"Good. Unshackle her. I don't think this pretty little one can do us much harm here." Commander Chion leered at Kali with beady eyes as the Troopers removed the binders. She did her best not to give a smart retort. Instead, she played along to keep his attention away from her advancing droid. Arfour easily slid up the ramp and into the shuttle behind him.

"Perhaps when Lord Vader is done with you, I will request your services here with me. I am in need of a 'companion' and I'm sure you would serve nicely." His cold hand brushed Kali's cheek as he inspected her from head to foot.

Repulsed, she spat at him. "I'd rather die first!" She wrenched herself away from his touch.

"That can be arranged!" The embarrassed Commander struck Kali with the back of his hand to her chin. She toppled to the ground on her hands and knees and looked up in horror at Chion. His eyes were blazing, filled with hate, a look that he would indeed enjoy watching her die. "Get this rebel scum on board!"

As Kali was lifted to her feet and led up the ship's ramp, she overheard two guards discussing their 'lucky' compatriot who was assigned as an Imperial spy among the Rebels. She motioned to R4 to begin recording their conversation. _This could prove to be helpful - if I make it out of here._

She was dropped into the copilot's seat of the shuttle's cockpit. Kali rubbed her chin noting that it was beginning to swell and throb. She tried moving her jaw back and forth when suddenly the sound of mechanical breathing reached her ringing ears. She could hear Darth Vader himself instructing the guards to remain while he took her to Dantooine below. Her sore jaw was forgotten as her heart pounded. _Keep calm!_

"Good afternoon Ensign. I am so pleased you can join me on this little journey. I'm sure you'll find it most entertaining." As Vader piloted the shuttle out of the central launch bay, Kali was certain she would never see the light of another day again.

SEVENTEEN

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"Mistress Leia, I have reviewed all the data on the entire contingent of staff here. I have been unable to find anything that directly links anyone to the Empire." Threepio had been reviewing the databanks continuously since the Princess had brought him the assignment.

Leia sighed. _So much for that idea! I didn't think it would be that easy, but IÂ could always hope that we'd get a break sometime._
"Thank you Threepio, that will be all."

"If you pardon, Mistress, that is not all."

"What are you talking about Goldenrod?" Han had joined them in the briefing room. He was just about to see if Leia needed anything before he left.

Threepio turned stiffly to face Han. "Well, sir. It seems that when I was correlating the facts on our staff histories, a very peculiar anomaly occurred."

"Threepio, please, get on with it!" Now Leia was getting anxious. Having Luke away, a potential spy in their midst and the pressures of setting up this new base were beginning to take a toll on her patience.

Threepio turned back and did a double take at Han. He was unsure of who he should address next. He tilted his head and shuffled back to face Leia.

"As I said, it seems that when I was collecting this data, I felt that I had made a mistake somewhere along the way, because I was certain I had come across information that I had already recorded. It turns out that I hadn't been mistaken, because when I double-checked, I discovered that two of your staff here have identical background histories. I must add that the odds of this happening, well, are even beyond my capacity! As well as exactly the same names, these two humans have identical backgrounds, including exact family member data! The only difference that sets them apart are their retinal scans on file." Threepio looked genuinely pleased with himself, if a droid can be said to be proud. He handed Leia the datatapes of his findings.

"It looks like we have our spy." added Han.

"Yes, but which one is which?" Leia wondered aloud.

EIGHTEEN

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"Do you mind telling me what I'm supposed to be doing now?" Kali was trying her best to stand up to the Dark figure looming over her. They had disembarked from the shuttle and stood in a small clearing in the thick forest of Dantooine.

His deep voice rumbled with menacing power. "You will do as I say, or you will never see your dear Skywalker again!"

He suddenly stopped his tirade and cocked his head a bit. He seemed to be listening to something she could not pick up with her own ears. He whispered "Good â€| he has arrived."

Luke! No! Kali took her one opportunity. While he seemed to be in his trance-like state, using the Force to track Luke's progress, she darted away into the forest underbrush as fast as she could. R4 tried to follow her, but Vader recovered. He lifted the droid high in the air then brought it crashing down on top of Kali. Knocking her over, Kali tried to roll out of the way to prevent being crushed by the weight of the droid's body, only to be pinned down by her left leg.

She pushed the unit off her, but not before ejecting the datatape of the Imperial's conversation about the spy. Arfour was still. The blow had completely destroyed it's circuits, and Kali knew she could do nothing for him. She got to her feet and limped away as fast as her injured body could take her.

Vader started after her, but with Luke approaching quickly, he stopped and decided he would let the forest and it's inhabitants take care of her. He had no further use for Kali anymore â€| his real prize was on his way.

NINETEEN

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"Artoo, you stay here with the ship. Hopefully I'll be back soon with Kali." Luke set out into the forest. He knew Vader was there, waiting for him. He had directed him here, and Luke was playing along. He only hoped he could save both Kali and himself. Luke stepped into a clearing.

"Welcome, young Skywalker, to Dantooine and to your Fate." The huge black figure had unhooked his saber, and now it hummed as the red blade extended to it's full length.

"Where is she?" Luke looked around. He glanced over at the shuttle, but he sensed it was empty.

"Oh, you mean my 'bait'? Well, after a hunter has sprung his trap, there is no further use for the bait. She is dead. And you will soon be joining her." Darth moved forward, slowly swinging the saber from side to side.

"NO!!!!" Luke could not, would not believe him! _Kali can't be dead! _He lost control and grabbed his saber, turning it on and swinging at the monster facing him.

The two warriors dueled, sabers crackling as they crossed, hissing when they cut through the thick forest growth. Back and forth they fought. Darth seemed to be playing with him, enjoying this practice of his Jedi skills. Luke surprised him, though. He was a better swordsman than he gave him credit for. _Perhaps I should not kill him after all. Perhaps it would be better to turn him to the Darkside
..._

TWENTY

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Kali had to go back, to try to find Luke and a way off this planet. It was getting dark, and the forest began to come alive. She wasn't so sure she liked the sounds that were moving closer and closer to her. But one sound didn't seem to be natural. She could hear a hissing, a sparking, so she headed towards it.

On her way, she spotted Luke's ship. Artoo whistled at her. "Artoo!

Am I glad to see you! Quick! Start up the engines, we're going to get Luke." As she jumped into the cockpit, she took out the datatape.
"But first, I have something you can keep for me."

Kali lifted the ship on it's repulsors and headed toward the clearing. Below she found Luke losing badly to Vader. He looked exhausted, and Vader seemed like a predatory animal just playing with him. It took all of Luke's energy to just protect himself from the fatal blows he was being pummeled with.

Kali didn't waste a second. She got Vader in her sights as he looked up at the X-wing swooping down on him. A single blast from her lasers caught the Dark Lord and spun him around. Luke blinked, disbelieving at first, watching Vader go down. _Did I do that?_ He looked up and couldn't believe his own eyes. _Kali! She wasn't dead!_

The T-65 landed next to Luke and he pulled himself inside, slumping behind the controls, as Kali moved to the empty space behind him. Vader was getting up again; he was still alive!

Luke took off immediately, as the Dark Lord's saber came flying of it's own accord directly at the ship. The X-wing turned, as the red glowing blade narrowly missed slicing through the cockpit's canopy. In a flash, they were ascending the sky above Dantooine.

Vader retrieved his lightsaber, and boarded the shuttle. He would not let them get away that easily. He went straight to the communications console. "Captain! Deploy your squadron and intercept that ship coming your way! I am returning to the bridge!" He wanted to watch as the snubfighter was utterly devastated by his contingent of TIES.

TWENTY-ONE

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"Luke, I have a bad feeling about this." Kali pointed out the front of the cockpit. The viewscreen was filling with TIE fighters, spewing out of the Star Destroyer.

"It doesn't look good, does it?" Luke said over his shoulder to her. He wanted to tell Kali how glad he was to see her again, but that would have to wait â€| he had to buy some time to get the escape coordinates to go to hyperspace.

The Imps were on them in no time. The X-wing began taking hit after hit. Artoo squealed his concern and flashed Luke the coordinates he needed. Just as they were about to leave, a burst of green lasers exploded in front of them. The control board went dead for a moment and he lost his calculations to make the jump. He was trying to keep in control, but it looked hopeless.

"Kali, I â€|" A strange shimmering outside made Luke stop and turn to look. The stars on his port side seemed to quiver. Out of hyperspace came the Rebel Fleet, led by the _Millennium Falcon_!

"Okay kid, the cavalry is here!" Han was flying in and out of the TIES, taking them out as fast as they approached. Kali knew those

voices over the comm; it was her old unit!

"You didn't think we'd let you out of your tour of duty that easily, do you?" Kali recognized the voice of her squad Leader, Commander Perin. She found herself smiling in spite of the battles raging all around them. The _Executor_, however, had more TIES being deployed all the time. Vader was taking no chances in letting them escape again.

"Han, we can't win against these odds, let's just make a run for it!" Luke got his coordinates back again and was ready to make the jump.

"You got it Luke. Okay Chewie, let's head for home!"

The _Falcon_, the Fleet and Luke's X-wing were gone in an instant.

Vader stood perfectly still looking out into space from the bridge of his command ship. Meanwhile, Admiral Dysan, who was at his side began to stiffen, gasp for air and grab at his throat

TWENTY - TWO

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"Luke! Welcome back!" Leia ran to their ships as they landed in the icy cavern. Threepio was trying his best to keep up with her.

Luke pulled off his helmet and bounded down the ladder from the cockpit. "Leia! I should really be angry with you for sending Han and the Fleet out after me! But it is a good thing you did. I don't think we would have returned if you hadn't."

Kali stepped down out of the ship and took Luke's hand for support. "Yes, Leia, thank you. The fact that you would risk so much for us is overwhelming." Kali looked exhausted, but perked up at a familiar voice coming up behind her.

"Well, we can't be kept a pilot short for too long, now, can we?" Commander Perin arrived and was pleased to have one of his best recruits back - and with no losses to his squadron to boot!

Han and Chewie joined the celebration.

"It looks like we both owe you one now, Han." Kali added, as she gave him a big hug. Chewie guffawed at the surprised look on his partner's face. Leia blushed and laughed aloud.

"Don't mention it. I was getting pretty bored sitting around here anyway" was all that Han could sputter.

"Oh, I almost forgot! Leia, I have something for you! Artoo, could you come here please?" Kali removed the datadisk from the droid and handed it to Leia. "I think you can use this. It's the identity of an Imperial spy in your midst."
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TWENTY - THREE

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He thought he was alone, hunched over the communications port in the Main Control Room, back to the door. Han, Luke, Leia and Kali stood quietly in the entranceway. He could feel someone's presence, but continued to try to send the message.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you." Han leveled his blaster at the agent's back.

Slowly, Major Baron turned. As he did, his hand slipped into his overalls' pocket and squeezed his gun. His eyes met Han's. The blast took them all by surprise, but it also seemed to happen in slow motion.

Han fired back, caught Baron square in the chest, and he fell; he was dead before he hit the ground. The datadisk with the Rebel location he was trying to transmit clattered on the cold floor. But it was too late. Luke turned to see Kali drop, a blaster burn still smoking from her body. "Kali! No! Not now!"

TWENTY - FOUR

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"Is she going to be all right, Leia?" Han couldn't help but feel responsible for how things had turned out. He could see that Luke was going through yet another crisis in his life. It seemed that Fate just wouldn't let him find peace.

Luke was slumped beside the bacta tank. He hadn't budged since Kali was submerged. The medic droid continued it's monitoring with quiet efficiency.

"I think she'll pull through, Han. But I'm also worried about Luke. I wish bacta could cure some of his wounds too."

Luke looked up and stared into the tank. His face was drawn and he looked so much older than he should. Kali began to move and was immediately pulled out of the sticky goo.

"I'm beginning to think that I should have stayed on that quiet, what did you call it? 'sandpit of a planet' Luke." Kali tried to sit up in her medbed without wincing. "Maybe then I wouldn't have put in so many hours in that terrible ooze." Despite her wounds, she still tried to keep Luke's spirits up. She hated to see him hurt like this because of her. She also knew that she had better make some decisions - right here and right now.

"Seriously, Luke. I think I'm going to take Commander Perin up on his offer of a temporary leave of absence from the Fleet. I can't fly for now anyway, and I have some personal responsibilities back home that I have been neglecting for too long."

Decision number one: she had to go back to Tatooine, to her family -- they had been taking care what was most important in her life.

Decision number two: Telling Luke right now would just complicate things. She wanted them to be together because it was right - not because he felt any obligation to stay with her. She could sense that Fate had grand plans for Luke Skywalker. She wanted to be a part of his future, but she also didn't want to hold him back. He was needed here.

"Kali, I â€¦" was all he could manage to say.

"It's okay Luke, really. My feelings for you haven't changed. In fact, they're stronger than ever. We'll see each other again, I know it. In the meantime, you take care of yourself, Luke Skywalker. The Force will be with you, always."

Through her tears she watched him go. She could wait. For now. But one day, she would see him again, and maybe, just maybe, they could be a real family.

END OF BOOK ONE

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_THE SAGA CONTINUES: _

BOOK 2: Chion's Revenge is now here !

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> September, 1997

End
file.